

## **SEATTLE DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES TASK FORCE TASK FORCE MEETING #5 SUMMARY: MAY 27, 2005**

### **Task Force Members:**

Ken Bounds, Co-chair  
Kate Joncas, Co-chair  
Catherine Stanford, Co-chair (absent)  
Bruce Bentley  
B. J. Brooks  
David Brewster  
Tina Bueche (absent)  
Jordan Royer (absent)  
Ron Sher

### **Parks & Rec/MID Staff:**

Christopher Williams  
Eric Friedli  
Kevin Bergsrud  
Rodney Nealer  
Cheryl Fraser  
Antoinette Daniel  
Dewey Potter  
Anita Woo

### **Consultant:**

Bonnie Berk

### **Citizens:**

Fred Kay

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Ken opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. B.J. Brooks discussed the parks tour held May 20, which staff and some Task Force members attended. The tour was very helpful in understanding the downtown parks, and staff are working to develop a slideshow to share with the Task Force at the June 17 meeting. Comments about the parks included the following:

- It's important to see that maintenance in the parks is generally good, but there are operational issues at some parks.
- Some parks are really glorified bus stops or waiting areas. They add variety and texture to the City, but you can't really do much to improve them.
- Why are some parks called parks? The Department has taken the view that if it's under our jurisdiction, it's called a park. Maybe this perspective should be revisited.
- Freeway Park is really large and presents a great opportunity for the City.
- Steinbrueck Park is relatively small and relatively full of people, but are there additional opportunities for vending that would be helpful?
- Westlake Center is a relatively successful park, we want others to be like that. One drawback to the Center is a lack of electricity.
- We saw very few people in certain parks.

### **Key Issue #3: Special Events, Vending and Permitting Presentation and Discussion**

Antoinette Daniel provided a briefing on Freeway Park programming activities this summer, "Summer in the Park." Activities will start June 20, and will include a mix of events including concerts and music performances, performance art, vending (through Beba's), Tricycle Day. There will be a game center and a walking loop too.

Anita Woo discussed the Programming and Events Subcommittee's findings regarding events. Scheduling events is difficult, the application process is cumbersome. One issue is that applicants now sometimes feel that they are being charged a variety of add-on fees, so the Subcommittee is working to simplify the fee process. They are exploring bundling of fees, and are examining what other cities do in this regard. Another challenge is having adequate utility service at key parks water, power and the ability to drive trucks into certain areas for loading/unloading.

#### **Task Force Discussion and Questions:**

- We should highlight the role of community organizations - these include Waterfront Partners, Friends of Victor Steinbrueck Park, the Freeway Park Association, Belltown P-Patch, Kobe Gardens - are all parks with support organizations that are at different levels of maturity and development. Q: is there a group for Myrtle Edwards Park? A: No, there used to be, but not now.
- We want to try to change peoples' habits about using the parks - to activate them. This isn't so much about events as it is about marketing and awareness. An example is the walking loop at Freeway Park, can we get people to use that park regularly for exercise? We need a different approach for this than how we do it now.
- The group perused the Special Events Handbook, which staff commented was a daunting document. An idea is to turn it into more of a short, attractive brochure, which is user-friendly. Q: will it be Citywide? A: we want to focus on the downtown parks - carve out a specific place for them, given their uniqueness.
- A lot of the rules and restrictions are related to input from neighboring businesses, this needs to continue to be considered.
- Some corporate groups have approached the City about doing events that involve alcohol this is very hard to permit. A question for the Task Force is to what extent we should encourage corporate events, and at which parks.
- Some potential event-givers need some assistance, someone to help them through the process. Virginia Swanson has a one-stop shop for this, but people don't know it exists.
- Some cities have one-stop shops for events; staff will take a closer look at how this is done.
- Some smaller events require the use of streets, which requires police to be there, on overtime. This adds to the cost.
- Perhaps we need a paradigm shift in our thinking about events at the parks -to move from being "a host instead of a gatekeeper." The current paradigm is to permit and regulate events that are requested. Perhaps instead the City should solicit third party groups to become providers of activities and events. This may take more than what the City offers now, which is the space. It may take staff support and infrastructure, all of which costs money!
- The Task Force should go park-by-park, identifying what we would like to see happen at each - goals for each park. Because each park has a unique character, and because there

are certain things that could go well in various parks, but not in others. We should be deliberate and selective about what we put in the parks.

- The Task Force should hear from experienced professionals regarding events - One Reel, Two Downtown and Seattle Center events organizers. We could ask them: what if it were easier to put on events at the parks - what would you want to do there?
- Bottom line: we should develop goals for each park including what we'd like to see happen there - what do we want to encourage and support at each place. Develop a mini-mission statement for each park.
- Identify the priority parks for programming, the places we'd like to see a lot of people. Then be proactive regarding programming those parks, and determine what to do to make effective, quality programming happen.
- We should have some general rules and a flexible process - be clear where the hard lines are, but take a flexible approach to meeting our objectives where possible. Perhaps have performance standards, by size of events.
- We need to talk at another meeting about governance issues. First, let's get a list of the priority parks, then identify options for how they can be managed to achieve those objectives.
- Another issue to discuss is connections to the City's other public open spaces and to private open spaces. Because there is market potential there to link them.

### **Preliminary List of Parks and Public Spaces by Tier and Tier 1 Parks**

Working from a three-tiered list of priority parks staff had developed (pink sheet), the Task Force brainstormed parks that should be included in Tier 1, priority parks. These are preliminarily defined as parks most suitable for Citywide programming and events. Tier 2 parks would be those most suitable for neighborhood-focused events, and Tier 3 parks are not well suited for events but have potential for public art and some vending. Tier 1 parks discussed were: 1. Freeway Park 2. Myrtle Edwards Park 3. Occidental Park 4. Hing Hay Park 5. Victor Steinbrueck Park 6. Westlake Park 7. Waterfront Park.

### **Use Guidelines and Vending Discussion**

Eric Friedli led a discussion of use guidelines (yellow sheets). He noted that supplemental use guidelines were approved in the early 1980s for four downtown parks - Waterfront, Freeway, Steinbrueck and Occidental. These use management guidelines restrict the types activities allowed in the parks and describe processes for approving uses. The Task Force discussed these guidelines generally, as well as vending issues for the parks.

Specific vending questions were identified for Occidental Park: how should the City proceed with a RFP for vending at that park? What about competition with existing businesses (always an issue for new vending)? What businesses should be encompassed - flowers, used booksellers, etc? What kinds of businesses will make it economically there?

Ron Sher noted that there are three possible approaches to vending: (1) a small kiosk; (2) use vending to change the impact or use of the space, by drawing more people to the park by serving as a magnet attraction; and (3) something in between #1 and #2. The group discussed getting input on this issue from retail experts. Other comments from the group were:

- Be cautious about permanent kiosks.

- We should envision what we want the overall character of the parks to be - the downtown parks in general need to make a comeback . A sense of downtown urban creativity, the downtown-ness of the parks, should be emphasized.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place 8 -10 a.m. on Friday, June 17, in the Boards & Commissions Conference Room on level 2 at City Hall.